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RUEHBZ/AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE 0154  
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0256  
RUEHKI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 0267  
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0168  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0115  
RUEHNJ/AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA 0443  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0427  
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0423  
RUEHGI/AMEMBASSY BANGUI 1110

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SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/C  
PARIS FOR RKANEDA  
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SUBJECT: EXTORTION, WITH A RECEIPT: ROADWAY INSECURITY CRIPPLING FOR THE C.A.R.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On March 27, 2009 a motorcycle belonging to an NGO working out of Birao in northeast Central African Republic (CAR) was stolen from its riders. What followed was an almost farcical tale of armed theft and extortion that is sadly typical of the state of lawlessness in most of the CAR once one leaves Bangui. Sadly, Post sees no end in sight to this menace despite a 2008 comprehensive peace accord that incorporated most of the rebels, including the ones who perpetrated this theft. The CAR government (CARG) lacks the means, and perhaps even the will, to address the problem of insecurity, whether due to armed rebels or simple thieves. This impacts everything from commerce to development to humanitarian relief, and effects over more than fifty percent of the national territory. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) An incident report from the French NGO ACTED describes, in detail, the rapaciousness of the local bandits and the rebel group UFDR (Union of Democratic Forces for Unity) and vividly illustrates the helplessness of those caught in the middle. On March 27, two local employees of ACTED were forcibly deprived of their motorcycle and related items by two assailants wearing ski masks and wielding AK-47s. The next day, an International Red Cross vehicle was hailed down by Sub-lieutenant Abduolaye Hamat of the UFDR, who claimed to have 'found' the motorcycle and wanted a reward of USD 200 for his troubles. ACTED officials, on the other hand, strongly suspect that the original bandits were working in concert with Hamat.

¶3. (SBU) Over the next six days ACTED negotiated with the UFDR military chief Zakaria Damane (NOTE: Damane is also an Inclusive Political Dialogue signatory and advisor to President Bozize.) Finally, Damane decided that ACTED did not have to pay the indemnity, but instead that the acting head of ACTED must personally pay the ransom. It is likely that this was decided to avoid paperwork for ACTED, but it unclear that ACTED actually agreed to the deal. Regardless, on April 6, 2009, Hamat appeared, armed, at the home of the acting head of ACTED and demanded the money. A meeting was quickly organized between ACTED, the Sous-Prefet (and Mayor of Birao), the UFDR and MINURCAT. As no one was willing to protect the interests of ACTED, the NGO was obliged to pay. Hamat generously signed a receipt of the payment from ACTED, stating he was being paid, 'as a counter party of the motorbike that was stolen'. As a result of this event and a previous attack upon an ACTED convoy five days before, the NGO has suspended its activities pending updated security procedures.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: While this event seems almost comical, it does underscore a fundamental crisis in the CAR:

- Road banditry strangles traffic along the CAR's decrepit roads. Within two days of this incident, there were three other reports of road holdups and sadly, this does not signal an upsurge. These are daily events and a direct result of a feeble government. While the Ministry of Defense may claim some 8,000 soldier and gendarmes, the Deputy Minister freely admits that only a bare 3,000 are actually capable of operations for a country the size of Texas. This means approximately one soldier or gendarme per 207 square kilometers. Additionally, their level of training and equipment is minimal.

- The international forces of MICOPAX and MINURCAT are even less effective as neither is large enough to cover the entire CAR. Moreover, and the former lacks the will to intervene and the latter lacks the mandate, as MINURCAT is limited to operating in only a small area in the extreme northeast of the country. It is thus important that one understands that the international forces in the CAR cannot or will not solve the problems of banditry and rebellion.

Until the government is able to exert effective control over its territory and thus protect trade and commerce - a prospect not soon to come - Post sees no end to further incidents of road banditry and rebel impunity. END COMMENT.

COOK